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WHAT TO DO WITH CIVILIZATION
IT IS MATERIAL—
SPIRITUALIZE IT.

A SERMON
BY
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Being the last of a series of six sermons which seek to set forth the present status and needs of civilization as viewed by six sets of counselors.

"It is Impossible—Get Rid of It."
"It is Bad—Moralize It."
"It is Ignorant, Vulgar—Teach, Cultivate It."
"It is Ugly—Beautify It."
"It is Poor—Materialize It."
"It is Material—Spiritualize It."

What to do with Civilization.

It is Material—Spiritualize it.

WE ARE seeking together a better world and better people to live in it. We have stopped at the houses of five interpreters for warning and admonition; have sought from each what he believes will be most helpful to us in our journey. One told us that what we ought to be seeking is not in civilization but back of it, before civilization came: told us that we ought to get free; go back and pick up what we have dropped. Four counselors said that we are on the right way, but that there are some things which need to be done. One said that people are not good enough; that the great need is for stricter observance of the moral law. One said it is futile to expect any improvement while people are so vulgar and uncultivated; the way out is to make more people who have knowledge and feel fine things. Another sees the unsightliness of the world; would save it from desecration and fill it with people who adorn their habitation. The fifth counselor said that it is true that all these things are needed; said that we should be better, wiser, more cultivated, more beautiful within and without. Goodness, truth and beauty are all lacking but they themselves are results. The world is short on these things because people are poor in material things. The first thing is to materialize men; give them richer surroundings to draw life from.

This brings us to the last who says that we are concerned too much already with the material things; urges that the hope of the world is in more highly spiritualized men. We have met this before in our quest. We found both a religious and a secular group saying the same thing for different reasons. One said that we are delayed by our material surroundings because they are carnal and therefore hostile to the things of the spirit that matter; the other objected to so many things because they burden us with their weight and complexity. Men with fewer things run the race of life not only with greater simplicity and nobility here, but also with greater assurance of reward in the life after this.

What should we say of this skepticism about a rich material world? This religious fear of material we found an ancient and Oriental idea, based on the premise, now discredited, that the living flesh of men is at enmity with the things approved of God. The countries which have been most indifferent to the material things about them have been those which have desecrated most this body, this house of life in which the spirit has its being here. Those most hostile to their surroundings, or most indifferent or superior to them, have wasted away in the very midst of the divine bounties; have treated as unclean and unholy the utensils and furnishings of His world; have called stumbling blocks that which was all about them to build into a great temple for the service of man, which is the service of God. Those who would dematerialize us out of complexity back to simplicity, we found as fallacious in reason as the religious in faith.

We found that cradle days and childish things are for retrospection but not for imitation or revival; found that the race has been through no stage to which it can return without treason to Him who placed us here to go on and not back.

Even those who would have a more highly spiritualized civilization have to be on guard lest they under-estimate the place of outward material helps. It is easy to have a high and haughty theory about things, which our whole practice and all the facts belie. We still have the phraseology of a very superior air toward the material things by which we live and without which we do not live but die. We still use the words which men used when they scorned and looked down upon things and all who dealt with them. In religion it was the man dealing with the things of God exclusively who was highly exalted, in his own estimation and the world's, over the man busy about earthly things. In philosophy it was the world of ideas scorning the world of matter. In the social code, in the bestowal of honors and distinctions, the churchman, the philosopher, the schoolman, the writer and the artist, all had recognition over those who worked with material things. Was this a false rating, with the primary things second and the secondary things first? A great change has come. We are bestowing more abundant honor upon those who make the material conditions about us. Our social code and rating for honors have been revised to take in those who deal with the vast machinery which produces and distributes the things by which we all live and without which our life would

be impossible for either low or high ends. Men of industry, invention and commerce have risen in the popular estimate above the first men of all previous generations: warriors, philosophers, churchmen, schoolmen, writers and artists.

We cannot in truth, with things as they are, disparage the tools. How shall these things needful be secured? It takes a highly materialized world to relieve the strain that leads to the broken moral law. What does it take to intellectualize the world and give it books and schools? It takes a material surplus, an accumulation built up to the point when men are ahead of today's needs. It takes a people materialized to the point that they can set the new generation free and set others free to teach and search out what to teach. It takes money to give knowledge, sweetness and light. Men and women must be fed, clothed and housed while they are giving these things to the world, and children must be set free by a family's or a nation's surplus while they are seeking these things. Even to spiritualize the world requires material help. Millions are being raised now to do this. Only people who have been diligent in business, storing up for the world a wealth of material things, can furnish these helps to carry the spirit and the good works of religion to a needy world. This liberty of ours that we were able to defend—here our accumulation was our power not only to save these things for ourselves but to save them for all men. We were able to set men free and maintain them while they did the things that had to be done. It is no disgrace that traders open up the way; that

commerce lands first with things to sell; that the flag follows commerce and protects it, and that civilization follows the flag. It is not a matter of reproach that men who carry Bibles, knowledge and healing follow where men go first to trade. This is the order of life. Of course they go first for they are the foundation of life, all life, even the critic's life. We cannot be superior to things as they are.

What has been the history thus far of highly materialized civilization? We are warned that it is too much for the human machine; it unnerves us: warned that it may imperil the soul. But more than this, history says, it has been always a great danger, nationally and racially. Those who look over the history of peoples say that it has been a rule of things, not a necessary law but the rule thus far, that a richly supplied state precedes and heralds decline. As soon as an accumulation was built up with which to buy more life, this at once attracted the notice of thieves and robbers. Other people came in and took what they had gathered. Materialized into freedom for finer things, they dwelt in peace and order; ceased to be fighting brutes. But there have been always those around the edges who did not care for fine things themselves and kept fit as fighting men only; destroyed what they could not appreciate or use. Are we at the end of this at last? Must nations always by a necessity of things go down before the robber as soon as they have gathered sufficient to begin to live? Are there enough people in the world now who do not care to do this to others, to combine and say that it shall not be done to them?

If so, then we are entering a new order in which a nation's wealth can make for more life and not for its death. If after all our striving for federated peoples we do not get this, then we are still under the old order.

Granted that we are entering a new order in which highly materialized nations will not be destroyed by enemies from without, is there any necessity of things which drives people to build up a surplus or use it to buy life? Is there any guarantee that families or nations invariably come up who are well supplied and undisturbed by enemies from without? Here we have no assurance. Although nations now are safer from robbers without, we still have internal matters to be reckoned with. Will a surplus be built up? Will it be used to buy life or damnation after it has been accumulated? What standard of life will be maintained within in peace and prosperity, undisturbed by foes without?

We are asking what bearing religion has upon building this surplus and buying life with it. Then we are asking what bearing religion has upon the whole crux of the situation: what standards people maintain. Are religious people better than other people? Will a large number of religious people put together make a better civilization than those not religious?

Political economists who speak guardedly say that there is very close connection between the kind of life lived and the amount of material surplus gathered. They say that a high ethical type of religion is a direct economic factor. They are not surprised to find

people of this type of religion with a surplus in their hands. The very qualities of life that this kind of religion requires, happen to be just the qualities too that produce more material things. And these are just the same qualities that conserve the surplus after it is built up. The kind of life which a high type of religion discourages is just the kind of life which does not gather a surplus and scatters it abroad when gathered. The kind of life that buys the things that waste is just the kind of life that cannot build an accumulation for itself and dissipates quickly what others have built. The connection between religion and being materialized up to the point of freedom, is direct cause and effect.

Then we ask what bearing religion has upon this matter of how people conduct themselves, and what standards of life they maintain. It may be pointed out that religion may have no bearing upon how people act. Early religions said that their business was to bargain with the power in control. Men may be zealous in the ceremonies and arise to steal and murder. Our "saved by character" is a protest against this primitive conception that religion and conduct are two things and not one. Saved by sacraments and the shed blood, no matter what you do or are, is a surviving remnant.

Has this kind of religion prevailed in our western civilization? True, all religious people have not been good people. Some of them have been very devils in iniquity. We do not forget this. Yet with all this said, the book of religion for all western civilization is most emphatic about how people act. Its

God sees and cares. Those who wrote the book believed that He made sure that they should have this point clear. He did not speak it to the air or write it on flimsy stuff. He wrote it on stone with his own hand so it would not fail to reach them. This insistence on doing right things increases as the book goes on. The prophets said He would not deal with any but righteous people. Jesus refined the demands and added a new list of things that should not be done; carried the test to the inmost thoughts. Wrong doing was connected with such consequences that men hesitated to move lest they do the things they should not. Leaning to the side of safety, they denied themselves much they could have done with profit.

However it may be from this time on, our civilization thus far has had morality and religion vitally joined. Right has been considered right because God is God, and it will win because it has Him on its side. Men have kept themselves in order because there is One who sees and cares. With most men, conduct has not been an academic matter, utilitarian or philosophical, or a matter of social custom, but a personal matter in the service of a God who sees. Thus far the why men do things, or refrain, has been connected with a sovereign conscience and the behests of a sovereign God of the moral order who rates men for time and eternity. In all the western world the book with this emphasis has been the only book of religion. Still half the people are in churches which connect the right of things with the God of things, and the other half have been moulded by the

same thought. This emphasis must have been a great influence through the centuries.

As a practical matter, doing the right thing is for most men a part of a personal service to the God of their religion who is particular about these things. A few find academic support for right wholly apart from the religious sanctions. Philosophically, rationalistically or scientifically, a few, comparatively very few, say they find reason for acting so in a godless world of matter and mechanism, with man's life but a span between two eternities of the dark besetting him behind and before. With them, they say, the authority of conscience and the commanding ought carry over though religion and her God cease to be believed. However high ethically this impersonal, disinterested service in a godless world may be, most men still mingle some affection with obedience and connect the duty to be done to men with the approving will of God. The everlasting imperativeness of duty becomes a gentle, compromising voice when the right of things gets divorced from the God of things. Morality, order and decency of life are likely to decline as religion declines. Integrity of life and the moral law often cease to command when religion ceases to back them up with authority. This is true not only with those of low tastes and mental powers but also it is true of those higher up. Intellectual movements emancipated from the authority of religion often let down shamefully in conduct and moral discrimination. Right becomes a matter of opinion rather the will of a world order in the service and under the eye of God. And with

those not so intellectually emancipated and self-sufficient—what immediate results in the city wilderness and the isolated country districts. Those competent to deal with facts, and standing high in public confidence, tell us of the alarming increase in ignorance, vice, superstition, abnormality and crime where the country church has declined.

So we have men, from whom we do not expect such counsel, admonishing us now that religion, speaking with authority and drawing with affection, may be just the thing on which our civilization depends. Men from whom we are accustomed to get counsel for our business only say that in their opinion all else we do to man does not make a being we can build into a permanent structure. Educate him; give him all the theories and tests of right; make him healthy; surround him with things in abundance; give him leisure and power without end, and still we have no guarantee of safety for person or property, two absolute requisites, without which not civilization but chaos. These urge upon us that the great need is more highly spiritualized men. Get men who think first of themselves as living spirits with divine relations; connect this spirit of man with a God whose will is the moral order of the world; make their dealings with men at once the service of man and the service of God; let them believe that all that is done to each is done to one precious in His sight, and such men as these put together will make a better world. These counselors are telling us that men must catch sight of the open and far horizon which only religion gives; must sense the eternal worth of man in the

eternal years, which only religion gives. This, they tell us, is the only kind of man we can teach, beautify and materialize with any assurance that, after we have done all, we have not for our pains an educated, beautified, materialized rascal who will undo us and our civilization.

When we think of it, this is just the thing that Jesus was always talking about. We can recall a number of places in the story where he urged that the only way to begin is to get a solid center first; get right within and pure in heart. Around this a man can be built. He was always saying that it is something within you that matters most, and getting this right is the only method he suggested for making the world better. To get even one right seemed to him worth any amount of trouble and great gain. This may be just what our civilization needs. We should be better citizens of the world if committed to a higher service. "The divinest views of life penetrate most clearly into the meanest emergencies. Nothing less than the majesty of God, and the powers of the world to come, can maintain the peace and sanctity of our homes, the order and serenity of our world."